



# COMMONS

Revista de Comunicación y Ciudadanía Digital

Publicación bianual

Volumen 5, Número 2 pp. 37-63

ISSN 2255-3401

Diciembre 2016

## **MEDIA INTERVENTION IN POST-WAR SETTINGS: INSIGHTS FROM THE EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE SOUTH**

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Fecha de envío: 8/9/2016

Fecha de aprobación: 10/11/2016

# MEDIA INTERVENTION IN POST-WAR SETTINGS: INSIGHTS FROM THE EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE SOUTH

## INTERVENCIÓN INTERNACIONAL A TRAVÉS DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN EN SOCIEDADES POSGUERRA: PERSPECTIVAS A PARTIR DE LAS EPISTEMOLOGÍAS DEL SUR

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### Abstract

Over the past two decades, international intervention in post-war settings has strictly followed liberal assumptions and practices. Efforts to build and shape the media in the aftermath of armed conflict are no exception. In setting the foundations for the rule of law, liberal democracy and free market, external actors have (re)defined what constitutes the mediascape – that is, the various spheres of communication within public discourse – and how to (re)construct it. Imprinted with modernity's tenets and western assumptions about the public space, this approach has understood the mediascape narrowly as limited to traditional, established, liberal media, serving to validate particular actors and processes whilst obscuring, neglecting and shutting off global diversity. Law and technology, this paper argues, are the two main axes through which legitimation and exclusion are effected. A myopic focus on legal and technological aspects of the media reduces a rich space of local discourses, norms and practices to western-like media legislation, training and outlets, narrowing in turn the sites for addressing violence and building peace.

### Resumen

*Durante las últimas dos décadas, la intervención internacional en contextos posguerra ha seguido estrictamente los supuestos y prácticas liberales. Los esfuerzos para construir y dar forma a los medios de comunicación después de los conflictos armados no son una excepción. Al sentar las bases del estado de derecho, de la democracia liberal y del libre mercado, los actores externos han definido lo que constituye el paisaje mediático, es decir, las diversas esferas de la comunicación en el discurso público y cómo reconstruirlo. Imbuido con los principios de la modernidad y los supuestos occidentales sobre el espacio público, este enfoque ha entendido el panorama mediático estrechamente como limitado a los medios tradicionales, establecidos y liberales, sirviendo para validar actores y procesos particulares mientras oscurece, descuida y cierra la diversidad global. El derecho y la tecnología, sostiene este documento, son los dos ejes principales a través de los cuales se efectúan la legitimación y la exclusión. Un enfoque miope en los aspectos legales y tecnológicos de los medios de comunicación que reduce un rico espacio de discursos, normas y prácticas locales a la legislación, la formación y los medios de comunicación de los medios occidentales, reduciendo a su vez los sitios para abordar la violencia y construir la paz.*

### Keywords

media; interventionism; epistemologies of the South; peace media; peacebuilding.

### Palabras clave

medios; intervencionismo; epistemologías del sur; medios por la paz; peacebuilding.

\*.This author's research was developed in the context of the research project «ALICE, strange mirrors, unsuspected lessons», coordinated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos ([alice.ces.uc.pt](mailto:alice.ces.uc.pt)) at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra – Portugal. The project is funded by the European Research Council, 7th Framework Program of the European Union (FP/2007-2013) / ERC Grant Agreement n. [269807].

### Introducción

Since the early 1990s, international intervention in post-war settings has strictly followed liberal assumptions and practices. Efforts to (re)build and shape the media in the aftermath of armed conflict are no exception. In setting the foundations for the rule of law, liberal democracy and free market, external actors have (re)defined what constitutes the mediascape – that is, the various spheres of communication within public discourse – and how to (re)construct it.

What started off, in the late 1980s, as humanitarian information suppliers (Howards, 2003; Wimhurst, 2002) and as public information offices within UN missions (Coker, 2003), evolved in the 1990s to a more profound media peacebuilding intervention which included these first experiences but have hitherto branched out to externally set up media, particularly radios and specific radio or video programming broadcasted through local media, in-depth training of journalists, editors, technicians and managers, as well as regulation mechanisms, engaging an increasing number of distinct governmental and non-governmental actors in the so-called Global South.

Political and institutional discourses about these interventions at the media level tend to highlight the space they provide for political accountability practices and fora, as well as the promotion of Human Rights and the market economy, thus helping to create more democratic and peaceful societies. Their focus on anti-polarization is also thought to contribute to the prevention of the (re)emergence of violent conflict and violent practices in post-war or unstable and violent-prone societies.

Yet, imprinted with modernity's tenets and western assumptions about the public space, the dominant liberal peacebuilding approach has in fact understood the mediascape narrowly as limited to a thin definition of media, mostly tailored to liberal media understandings and inevitably in conformity to a particular political, economic and societal image. This approach, underpinned by centuries of hegemonic knowledge and political authority, has served to validate hegemonic actors and processes whilst perpetuating a parochial alleged universalism and obscuring, neglecting and shutting off global diversity. Consequently, media peacebuilding intervention has actually helped to reduce the space of local discourses, norms and practices.

Indeed, the broad mediascape is a crucial space to understand the deep social and political processes that sustain a society, as well as its own structural and discursive dynamics. Leaving aside – unaddressed, unquestioned – a significant part of the mediascape and its discourses and agents has left peacebuilding efforts through media interventions at best severely amputated, and at worst doomed to failure. Moreover, the promise of empowerment that lies beneath

1. This overlapping of difference and anachronism is responsible for the invisibility and the waste of a large amount of the world's experience and knowledge (Sousa Santos, 2014). On the creation of western dichotomies and the alterity, see also, among others, Said, 1978; Hall, 1992; Lander, 2000; Escobar, 2003; Sousa Santos *et. al.*, 2004; Quijano, 2009; Young, 2009.

the liberal peace proposal is also denied to populations that are forced to comply with external and supply-driven procedures and continue to lack the means to make their voices heard and matter. Finally, it contributes to perpetuating what Boaventura Sousa Santos calls the abyssal line (2014), which classifies people and knowledge according to dichotomies established by the western modern narrative of linear progress: primitive and advanced, developed and underdeveloped, chaos and order, relevant and irrelevant<sup>1</sup>.

Law and technology, this paper argues, are the two main axes through which legitimization and exclusion are effected. If one acknowledges that the mediascape constitutes all crucial public discursive spheres of signification, legitimization, domination and/or transformation of societies, a myopic focus on legal and technological aspects of the media reduces a rich space of local discourses, norms and practices to western-like media legislation, training, fora and outlets – which, in turn, narrows the sites for addressing violence and building peace. This article aims therefore to not only present a critique of current understandings and practices of international peace media interventions, but it also seeks to offer an exploratory reflection which rehearses the construction of alternatives to the status quo on the basis of Sousa Santos' proposal of a sociology of absences and emergencies (2014). This article thus takes a predominantly theoretical, analytical and exploratory approach, applying the two most accomplished manifestations of the abyssal line to the mediascape and peace media interventions in post-war societies.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part maps Sousa Santos' proposal of the Epistemologies of the South — the basis upon which our critique is drawn. The second part presents the political and analytical context within which liberal peacebuilding emerged and was consolidated as an international intervention tool and programme, arguing that it not only reflects the abyssal line's logic from its inception, but that the fact that it is structured upon that logic legitimises its own existence. The article then explores our main argument regarding modern law and modern science — the former expressed by means of media regulation and the latter expressed by means of technology. Finally, we explain the need to deconstruct the universal character of abyssal thinking within media peacebuilding intervention, and to open up space for discussing what is beyond the western, modern, liberal media thinking and practice,

rescuing other experiences and voices that have been silenced and suppressed from the liberal mediascape. By addressing deep-rooted forms of violence and focusing on local participation, we wish to reveal – and, hence, identify a research agenda based on – broader possibilities of building peace, understood not as an ultimate stage but rather as a permanently ongoing and negotiated, participated and emancipatory process.

### 1. The Limits of Dichotomies and the Epistemologies of the South

The awareness that coloniality survived the end of political colonialism, the criticism to the European-white-male canon that dominates social sciences and the call for the urgency of decolonizing epistemology have been developed within different schools and geographies<sup>2</sup>. In this article, we adopt Boaventura de Sousa Santos' metaphor of abyssal thinking and his proposal of the Epistemologies of the South. To describe the way modern Western thinking operates, Sousa Santos (2014) developed the concept of abyssal line, a well-conceived metaphor of the invisibility of the Global South's diversity. According to the Epistemologies of the South (Ibid.), modern western thinking is an abyssal thinking that creates a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the latter being the foundation of the former. These invisible distinctions are created through an abyssal line that divides the world between what exists and what does not, being the nonexistence actively produced by modern thinking every time difference is not recognized. What fits outside modern framework is a blurred reality encapsulated into the category of Other, classified not for what it is, but for how far from the alleged universal model it remains. In this line, the civilizational pattern of modernity is the image of the future for the part of the world which is different and, hence, classified as irrelevant. The main characteristic of the abyssal thinking is the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line, meaning that, from the point of view of the visible side of the line, the other lives are in a pre-modern age and must learn from the present having nothing to teach (Sousa Santos, 2006; 2014).

In our interpretation of the Epistemologies of the South, abyssal thinking is primarily the product of the monoculture of knowledge (Ibid.) and the monoculture of law (Araújo, 2015; Araújo, 2016). As mirrors reflecting each other at the service of a global capitalist hegemony, both of them feed and are fed by the other four monocultures defined by Sousa Santos (2014): the monoculture of linear time of progress that produces the residual,

2. Several schools and research lines have criticised the Eurocentric colonial thinking and drawn attention to both the silenced voices and the invisible knowledge of the South, including Post-colonial Studies, especially those rooted within cultural studies and literature (e.g., Said, 1978 and Spivak, 1988), Subaltern Studies (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2000), Decolonial Studies (e.g., Quijano, 1991; Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007), and the Epistemologies of the South (Sousa Santos, 2014).

3. On the global imposition of the rule of law as a mechanism of expansion of the capitalist and colonial project, see Araújo (2016).

the monoculture of the naturalization of differences that classifies the inferior, the monoculture of dominant scale that decides what is local, the monoculture of the production of economic growth and capitalist development that declares the unproductive or the lazy. The production of non-existence results in the dramatic waste of experience that must become visible in order to amplify the emancipatory political imagination. In this sense, the sociology of absences and emergencies is a crucial component of the Epistemologies of the South. The former works mainly through an ecology of knowledges (Ibid.) and an ecology of law and justices (Araújo, 2014; Araújo, 2016), both of them confronting monocultures with diversity and amplifying the present by adding to it what the abyssal thinking subtracted. The latter expands the possibilities of the future, creating new utopias sustained on the amplified present (Sousa Santos, 2014).

## 2. The Abyssal Line as Structural Axis of the Liberal Peacebuilding Canon

The end of the Cold War educed a mounting optimism concerning the coming new world order. As the iron curtain trembled down, the belief that the liberal project of modernity (e.g. democracy, individual rights and freedom, market economy, rationality as thought and policy reference) would become true as a world political, social and economic project was then boosted. In his speech, on the 16th January 1991, George Bush proclaimed the forge of a new world order that would foster a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations (Bush, 1991). The speech highlighted precisely the dividing line between two worlds: modern order and pre-modern disorder<sup>3</sup>. However, in the 1990s, the spread of violent armed conflicts rapidly challenged the optimism nurtured at that time around the proposal of a liberal political order assured by the state, market economy, human rights, rule of law, and the western linear time conception, best portrayed by Fukuyama's end of History (1992).

When confronted with these violent conflicts, western academia, think tanks and political leaders (and the subsequent consensual acceptance of the liberal modern hegemonic narrative worldwide) labelled them as new wars (Kaldor, 1999), as their features, deeply distanced from the classical,

rational, interstate wars of the modern period, were perceived as a novelty and a potentially disruptive challenge to the existing world order. Angola, Somalia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda were some of the examples put forward to illustrate these new types of violent conflicts.

The way this phenomenon was analysed and the recommended measures to restore order highlighted how the abyssal line has been present and reproduced within peacebuilding politics and intervention since its very beginning as their structural axis, guiding procedures, policies, politics and evaluations. Indeed, the interpretative exercise to account for these new wars used the same abyssal line logic with which the West has continuously analysed non-western episodes, trends, places and dynamics, i.e., by way of creating two homogeneous worlds, the western – superior, developed, sophisticated – and the non-western – inferior, underdeveloped, underachieved, barbaric, ignorant and sometimes exotic – which relate hierarchically with one another (see Abrahamsen, 2000).

This is particularly evident when paying attention to the fact that these violent conflicts were not classified and examined taking into account the phenomenon per se and the specificities that constituted it, but rather taking the western modern hegemonic reference of organising societies and relating to one another (i.e., state, rule of law, liberal democracy, formal market economy, rational war), proclaiming as new all that did not fit the modern political, economic, legal and social organising rationale. Merging novelty with deviant, the explanatory rhetoric to describe these phenomena was not based on specific unabridged concepts but rather on a conceptual construction based on absence or ineptitude: fragile States (Zartman, 1995; Rotberg, 2002), *informal* economies (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004), actors beyond the State (paramilitaries or militias, interests groups, religious or ethnic leaders), violence towards civilians (Kaldor, 1999), and the rhetoric of ethnic and religious identity (Gurr & Harff, 1994; Ukiwo, 2005), as opposed to modern consolidated states, formal capitalist economies, state actors, state military agents as unique targets and perpetrators, and national political agendas.



Concepts used to characterize these new wars are always the deformed pole of modern dichotomy. As distance between poles is conceived as linear time, the narrative includes the possibility for change, understood as evolution, namely by rescue or modelling. Several authors point to the encounter with America and indigenous peoples as creating the foundational debate on civilised versus uncivilised (see Todorov, 1984). Starting with the seafaring of Christopher Columbus and Pedro Álvares Cabral, the discussion hit its climax with the Valladolid Dispute, in 1550, with two different discourses in confrontation. On the one hand, a discourse led by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, for whom Indians were inferior and hence natural slaves; on the other hand, a discourse led by Bartolomeu de Las Casas which perceived the Indians as rational and free human beings, with their own culture and institutions. As Sousa Santos concluded (2002), Sepúlveda's paradigm prevailed since it was compatible with the new capitalist world system.

This bipolar logic is clear within the analysis of the so-called new wars in the form of an international academic and political discourse, which pathologizes this specific form of conflictuality (Pureza *et al.* 2005). Indeed, the medical metaphor is often used as a rhetorical resource to reinforce this deviant condition (Ibid.). This pathologization entails three key elements which support the argument that the DNA of peacebuilding interventions is based upon abyssal lines and, subsequently, on an act of rendering invisible alternative knowledges and models of organising societies. The first is that there is a *judgemental subtext* by making use of a disease analogy. It reflects an image of diminished capacity or weakness and a higher (healthier) position capacity of displaying a critical perspective on these violent phenomena on the part of the West. The second element is the possibility of treatment and the identification of experts to put forward the arranged therapeutics: if seen as a medical condition these phenomena are susceptible of being corrected if the right therapeutic is applied. The diagnosing power, based on recognised knowledge and on centuries of built social authority, allowed international actors to interpret these crises and situations in terms of what they wished for the international system (Sogge, 2002; Pureza *et al.*, 2005). The corollary of these two (and thus, the subsequent third element) is a hierarchical and dependent relation between the one that holds the necessary knowledge and experience and the one that supposedly lacks that knowledge and practice but who needs it to be rescued.

Just as the way that reading the conflict comes from Western lenses, the solution and the therapeutic model to restore and maintain peace are similarly modelled according to this imaginary as well as the political, social, economic and legal model. The new world order launched in the post-Cold War was constituted by five major ideas, which summarise the liberal proposal for each particular society and for international relations as a whole:

- 1) Liberal peace and institutionalism as the preferred basis for international relations (Doyle, 1986; Mandelbaum, 2003).
- 2) The state as the political organising principle of international relations and political communities (Jeong, 2005).
- 3) Liberal democracy as the ideal form of organising political life within the state (Doyle, 1986; Mandelbaum, 2003).
- 4) Capitalism and free market as the necessary systems and structures to produce wealth (Mandelbaum, 2003).
- 5) The rule of law as the preferred grammar for ordering societies (Zeeuw, 2001).

The pathologization and the universalization of the treatment of these violent conflicts has reinforced, firstly, the program of liberal modernity as a path to peace (Borges & Santos, 2009) and, secondly, the international consensus around these two dichotomies – darkness versus light and unmodern versus peace – where the negative could be rescued becoming, hence, positive. A growing number of academic literature and political reports, particularly the UN, OSCE, World Bank, UNDP and UNESCO, have emerged creating a hegemonic consensus within international society (clearly dominated by both western principles and powers) on the causes of the post-Cold War conflicts and on how peace should be restored and maintained in both these specific regions and globally. Based on this academic and political consensus, the so-called international society, at a first stage within the United Nations framework, developed the peacebuilding model, perceived as one of the key instruments used to normalize the then categorized and perceived unordered societies taking as reference the specific liberal framework, considered, perceived and presented as the ideal universal form of organising peaceful, modernised, democratic and wealthy societies. Peacebuilding became an essential guiding principle of the UN and other international actors' framework of action in post-conflict scenarios, following its inclusion in Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace* (UN, 1992), where peacebuilding became a mainstream concept in the strategic vocabulary of international relations and the liberal peace was presented as a 'universal' consensual project.

4. "The mass media, by disseminating information on the aims, aspirations, cultures and needs of all peoples, contribute to eliminate ignorance and misunderstanding between peoples, (...) [making] nationals of a country sensitive to the needs and desires of others, to ensure the respect of the rights and dignity of all nations, all peoples and all individuals without distinction of race, sex, language, religion or nationality and to draw attention to the great evils which afflict humanity, such as poverty, malnutrition and diseases, thereby promoting the formulation by States of the policies best able to promote the reduction of international tension and the peaceful and equitable settlement of international disputes" (UNESCO *Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, apartheid and incitement to war* 1978, article III).

5. In its UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/53/243.

### 3. Liberal media peacebuilding intervention as an abyssal line

Liberal media intervention is here understood as international interventions within peacebuilding missions in the aftermath of armed conflict aimed to build peace and prevent violence from re-erupting by means of (re) defining what constitutes the mediascape – that is, the various spheres and tools of communication within public discourse – and how to (re)construct it. Specifically, it consists of creation of media outlets aimed at building liberal peace on the ground; international led media programming aimed at reconciliation and bringing parties closer together; journalist and media managers training; drafting and creating specific laws that can protect press freedom, freedom of expression, and media private ownership (Santos, 2010). Having its roots in earlier decades, media intervention emerged as a significant intervention tool of development and peacebuilding policies in the 1980s and 1990s. This section intends to demonstrate how the evolution of media peacebuilding intervention strictly reproduces the ‘abyssal line’.

#### 3.1 An ideological exclusionary program and practice

From a political and institutional point of view, the recognition of the importance of the media in building peace has been present since the end of the Second World War. When stating that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed (UNESCO, 1947), the Constitution Treaty of UNESCO (1947) inaugurated the principle for media aiming at peacebuilding within the international sphere and international intervention in both Global North and Global South societies. Twenty years later, and already within the framework of the Cold War bipolarity, the preamble to Section III of the Helsinki Final Act (OSCE, 1975) stated the need to expand the cooperation and dissemination of information at the level of the media and media outlets aiming at promoting mutual understanding of the peoples as well as the general objectives of the Final Act. In 1978, UNESCO reinforced the importance and key role of the mass media in the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering racialism, apartheid and incitement to war (UNESCO, 1978, article III)<sup>4</sup>. In 1999, the UN<sup>5</sup> acknowledges the importance of the mass media as a way to build and broadcast a culture of peace worldwide.

However, despite the continuous presence of international institutional acknowledgement of the (potential) role of media in horizontally building a culture of peace worldwide, the formal presence of media in peacebuilding intervention only happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, these interventions did not integrate the McBride Report's recommendations (1980), aimed at challenging the world hierarchical communication *status quo*, where sources of information were mainly broadcasted by media outlets from the Global North, hence decreasing the democratization of communication worldwide, conditioning media representations of the developing world and strengthening the dependence of Global South societies on external information and communication sources<sup>6</sup>. In fact, as the initial rhetoric to justify media intervention and the specific programming on the ground got ideologically refined and narrowed towards liberal understanding and particular image of societies, as well as constricted to targeting almost exclusively Global South societies<sup>7</sup>, the range and depth of media peacebuilding intervention was, on the contrary, increasingly extended and pronounced, as well as vertically implemented.

Sofia José Santos (2010) systematises the institutional consolidation of media peacebuilding intervention into three main typologies whose difference is based upon projects and outcomes and whose advancement is developed on a cumulative logic rather than on an exclusionary or overlapping one<sup>8</sup>. The first typology kicked-off in the late 1980s, when media peace intervention was used as a key element to assist in humanitarian terms (Howard, 2003; Wimhurst, 2002), by means of informing on food and water distribution and supply, and alert for mined and battlefield zones (Florian, 2004). The second typology developed progressively from late 1980s and mainly during the 1990s as the media ceased to be merely used and perceived exclusively as a means for humanitarian information, and started to play the role of public information tool to gain and maintain a broad support and understanding of peace operations intervening on the ground, as Coker explained regarding UNAMISIL in Sierra Leone (2003:9)<sup>9</sup>. As Manuel states (2004), one of the first tasks of the UN mission is to ensure that its presence and mandate are understood, as well as to engage the local population in the peace process. The third typology represents a greater step forward since it intends to model target societies to a specific liberal program of peace. It is based upon the bottom-line idea that media outlets and programming should be set up to broadcast in line with the

6. The MacBride Report (MacBride *et al.*, 1980), chaired by Irish Nobel laureate Seán MacBride and published by UNESCO, in 1980, represents a counter-hegemonic attempt kicked off by the non-alignment movement which drew a set of recommendations to make global media representation more equitable worldwide – the title of the report best synthesizes this idea: Many voices, one world –, hence creating and informing a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Much criticism emerged against this Report, particularly from the United States of America and the United Kingdom, as the NWICO would constitute a barrier to the free flow of communication, which was an established international legal principle (Raube-Wilson, 1986), and to the capitalist logic of major media corporations.

7. As Santos (2012) states when reflecting on peace media proposals and intervention on the ground, media interventionist proposals have been too focused on (artificial) dichotomies, such as conflict/war and peace, and (hierarchical) North-South divides, ignoring the important dynamics of dialogue and interaction, and of hegemonic construction between those two poles.

8. Although the disseminating of accurate information to those who were affected directly by the conflict has always been a UN concern, whose practice evolved considerably over its peacekeeping's 56-year history (Manuel, 2004), this article focus on media intervention from late 1980s onwards, when it became most intense and complex, and dramatically reinforced the abyssal line.

9. Notwithstanding these practices, the idea of integrating peace media within peacebuilding missions and peace efforts worldwide was only formally adopted in 1995 on the *Supplement to the Agenda for Peace*, where the then Secretary-general of the UN, Boutros-Ghali, stated that peacebuilding missions should have the capacity for effective intervention [...] in order to allow them to explain their mandate. (Boutros-Ghali, 1995).

10. In Oct. 1992, UNTAC set up its own radio station, authorized by a Security Council resolution and the Government of Cambodia, and using initially a rehabilitated government transmitter. Although installation and technical problems delayed complete, nation-wide coverage until just days before the election, UNTAC radio had a profound impression on the political mood of the country and is credited with helping the high voter turn out (over 90 percent) with its constant refrain of the mission's mantra your vote is secret. UNTAC radio offered free, equal access and equal time to all 20 political parties (Manuel, 2004).

peacebuilding liberal intervention model (Hieber, 2001) – that is why Ross Howard (2002:11) coined it as Intended Outcome Programming since, as Bush (2004) also argues, the media performed a key role in making peacebuilding intervention model and desired outcome reach out directly to the people, educating the latter in the sense of the first, optimizing thus the penetration of the liberal standardized peace model in post-war societies (Santos, 2010). Early examples of this kind of media intervention can be identified in UNCTAD mission in Cambodia<sup>10</sup>, UNTAG in Namibia or UNAMET in Timor-Leste, where the main goal of UN radios was to form the civic conscience of citizens to prepare them for elections (Manuel, 2004). These were, in fact, what one can consider the embryonic experience of the wider and deeper media ideological intervention projects – which correspond to this third typology - that took place, for example, in Kosovo (1999 onwards) and in DRC (2002 onwards), where specific radio stations were created and media reforms and training were launched, making media peacebuilding intervention stronger than ever before. This article focuses on this third typology not because the others have disappeared but because it dramatically reinforces the abyssal line.

In this third typology, media peace intervention was based upon four main areas. The first is dedicated to journalism training and involves a wide range of activities aiming at improving professional skills in writing, reporting, editing; production research and management; raising awareness of journalistic ethics; strengthening journalism education programs in universities; developing instructional materials; and facilitating continuing dialogue among the journalists, owners and educators in the region (CDG, 1999:32). The ultimate goal is to develop the capacity for professional, objective reporting (CDG, 1999:10), one of the pillars of modern journalism. Within modern journalism training, the language used is the one based upon universal human rights, such as freedom of expression, and is based upon the export of Western press practices and idealized social roles (Miller, 2009:13-14). The second area is devoted to media law and regulatory reform, which is undertaken, on the one hand, to certify and protect free speech, free press and the right to information. On the other hand, it is mandated to create all necessary laws to make media outlets cost-effective in the long-term. The third area relates to training on media management and aims at developing and training the capacity and skills of media owners, managers, editors, professional media associations, and individual journalists to increase the sustainability and professionalism of (private) media outlets. Also, enhancing the ability of independent media outlets to resist influence from the government or different other players is



critical to allow them to avoid abuse and manipulation (Price, 2001). Finally, the fourth area is the creation of media outlets and contents, usually labelled as peace media (Hieber, 2001; Bratic, 2005; Santos, 2010). By means of their programming, these media aim at contributing to the pacification and anti-polarization of societies as well as to the creation of political accountability practices and fora, helping therefore to create (formal) democratic structures and promote economic growth and, consequently, prevent the (re)emergence of violent conflict and practices in post-war or unstable societies.

Yet, western modern assumptions about the public space have meant that the dominant liberal peacebuilding model has limited the mediascape to traditional, established, liberal media, which validate actors and processes whilst silencing alternatives. Law and technology, we argue, have a particular role to play in legitimating and excluding these other voices.

### 3.2 Technology and media law as abyssal legitimization tools

The media that are recognised as such are based upon the development of scientific knowledge and are regulated according to Western modern law<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the consensual agreement that technology is important (Kline, 1985), the definition of what western modern technology is has been subject to intense and multidisciplinary debate (Kline, 1985; Dusek, 2006). Recognizing that the debate on technology has been based upon a western conception of what technology is, the concept is here understood as: 1) a tool, i.e., an instrument which allows to perform, enrich, optimize or merely facilitate communication among individuals and/or groups; 2) as a good in a Marxist perspective; and finally, 3) as an interconnected (capitalist modern) system, i.e. the complex of hardware, knowledge, inventors, operators, repair people, consumers, marketers, advertisers, government administrators, and others involved in a technology (Dusek, 2006:35). These three approaches converge to a socio-centric perspective of technology – i.e. its starting point is society and perceives technological application as a power tool of organised social, political and economic forces (McQuail, 2009[1983]) – with a clear social materialist slant – i.e. linked to a critical view of media ownership and control, that ultimately are held to shape the dominant ideology transmitted or endorsed by the media (Ibid.:40).

11. This article does not aim to criticize the media and technology per se, but the definition of a canon that renders invisible other knowledges, other technologies and other forms of conceiving, as well as other ways of understanding the regulation of the media.

12. In many advanced economies, the ubiquity of the internet is now a given. It permeates commerce, social interactions, politics, culture and daily life. But this is not the case in all parts of the world. And while internet access continues to grow in poorer nations, there is still a long way to go before the world is completely wired (Poushter, 2016:7).

Tacking stock on the western conception of technology and analysing it as a tool, the technological nature of the media allows media to explore the non-verbal language in a strong and unique way. The use of images, colours, sounds and the subsequent textures they create promotes the potential and contextualises verbal language, making it incredibly and increasingly richer, thus contributing to a better communication impact (Santos, 2012; 2015). On the other hand, the great transformations and technological developments that the media have undertaken in the last decades give them a significant capacity to reach increasingly wider geographies, allowing them to bridge otherwise unbridgeable realities (Santos, 2015), and creating 'stretched-out networks' (Callon & Latour, 1981), both in terms of geography and contents. Also, from a democratic and participatory perspective, technology has been extremely prolific in allowing commonly voiceless people, groups and/or communities to be able to give an account and mutate from receptors to emitters, optimising the potential of resistance and counter-hegemonic dynamics, even if, as a recent report of Pew Research Centre (Poushter, 2016) shows, there is still a long way to go before the world is completely wired<sup>12</sup>. Technology as a tool renders messages increasingly richer, from a communication point of view (Santos, 2015), and easily accessible to virtually everyone, regardless of social, economic, cultural background and geographies. It allows that virtually everyone by means of technological tools and/or platforms tell their own stories, energising, hence, citizen information, enhancing political participation and contestation as well as counter-hegemonic politics.

However, from a Marxist perspective, technology is a good. Accordingly, a good is never just a good but rather has a value in it (Marx, 1977[1867]), thus holding several different types of communicative content, even if not saying a word. In using technology, we make many unwitting cultural [economic, social and political] choices (Feenberg, 1991). For example, some technologies, such as automobiles, communicate the status of their owners (Forty, 1986 *apud* Feenberg, 1991). In this sense, the mere possibility of owning or using a specific technology makes one to belong to one side of the line. Likewise, the hierarchy of the technical gets completely merged with social hierarchy (Habermas, 2006), which highlights even more the governing and controlling character of technology.

Finally, as a system, technology is a combined system of tools, knowledge and working positions that are interconnected, based upon the western science and meant to provide for the maintenance and optimisation of the capitalist system.

Whether, from a tool perspective, there is nothing fundamentally problematic in modern technology (Marcuse, 1969)<sup>13</sup>, from a system and a Marxist perspective, and using the Epistemologies of the South lenses, to use technology is to be placed on one side of the abyssal line, i.e., within the space of the rational, modern, forefront, developed, successful. In this line, by being subjected to epistemic, political and economic dominant interests (Ibid.), technology becomes an instrument of domination. Also, technology limits the possibility of access to media production. Conversely to other so-called traditional media, and despite being virtually potentially accessible to all, technological media can only be owned by those with the sufficient material power to buy it, excluding all those who do not have the production means to produce it or enough capital to buy it. As what results from modern science in general, technology becomes problematic when it is used as a universal canon, hence performing the role of main filter of inclusion and exclusion of what can be qualified as media (Carvalho & Santos, forthcoming; Araújo & Santos, 2017; Santos, 2017). Nowadays when one thinks of the concept of media, notions such as technicality, automaticity and immediacy emerge (Carvalho & Santos, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the concern with the media as a discursive reality, the etymology of the word, as well as the communicative and discursive processes that the concept intends to summarize are much earlier than what modern western technology, dating back to the creation of cave rock paintings and other pictorial and oral mechanisms of transmission of a message to many receivers (Briggs & Burke, 2009). Similarly, records of such processes can be found throughout the world (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005; Cohen & Glover, 2014). Both communication concerns and practices of a specific emitter to several receptors is universal and much older than modernity. The evolution of what is considered to be 'media' in terms of both dominant literature and common sense has been drawn and conceived as if the media reality, evolution and expressions strictly overlapped western modernity's path and its meta-narrative of progress (Carvalho & Santos, forthcoming; Araújo & Santos, 2017; Santos, 2017). I.e., as if the media were a western technology communicative reality exclusive or limited to a time window, a geographical area or a specific culture and the dynamics and the understanding of the world did not exceed much the Western understanding of the world (Ibid.).

13. This goes in line with Marcuse's perspective on technology. According to the author (1969), the value of technology is not fixed, but rather directly dependent on its given use. Human beings and human rationality are then inseparable, involved in technology's value. Being part of a social process, technology can, thus, emerge as either potentially emancipatory or potentially dominating.



The Eurocentric modernity is both an epistemological and legal project. Societies have always been as legally plural as culturally diverse. Modern law is, therefore, a western invention, translated to the countries of the South as a condition for them to receive foreign aid. If modern science sets the standards for a civilised society, the rule of law ensures its translation both into limits to which the subjects are submitted and into maps that circumscribe the horizon of possibilities. By ignoring the fact that modern law has a place of enunciation, its universality is claimed. As such, the imposition flow that exists from the North towards the South occurs not only in the definition of the relevant technology for the media (Carvalho & Santos, forthcoming; Araújo & Santos, 2017), but also on the kind of rules to which they must be subjected (Araújo, 2016). As Marcuse (1969b) states, the language of law does not only define what is wrong and what is correct – as it is usually perceived – but rather validates behaviours and terminologies aiming to perform a successful regulatory mechanism of the (liberal capitalist) *status quo*.

Based upon abstract and universal principles, the liberal peacebuilding model postulates: freedom of expression; freedom of information; journalistic ethics; media pluralism; and the creation of a sustainable media competitive market. Media regulation within peacebuilding contexts is based upon three main pillars – pillars which provide legitimacy and action guidelines to the whole endeavour – and which we call the legitimization trilogy since they constitute a set of three dimensions of regulation which, despite being able to be perceived as single elements, are connected and underpin each other.

The first component relates to ethics and is based upon western conceptions on how to do professional journalism; it defines both the formal objectives of journalism and a step-by-step guide on how to do it best, excluding all other forms of doing journalism. Disregarding contesting and dissenting voices in favour of western-like journalism implies giving preference to institutional sources over non-institutional ones (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), thus clearly favouring the liberal set up imposed by external actors. The second and the third components concern ordinary and constitutional law, i.e., the legal boundaries and standards to which practices and behaviours should observe. These are the spaces where the rules of the game are defined. That is, where media procedures, licences, principles, and functioning rules, as well as rights and duties of media professionals and citizens are established. The language of regulation is based on the discourse on human rights, thus exporting the practices and social roles

of western societies (Miller, 2009). Media regulation is therefore another expression that reflects and reproduces a vaster hegemonic legal order that mimics the coloniality of knowledge and divides the world between what counts and what is irrelevant.

### **Conclusion- Ears to the ground: the need to overcome the liberal media intervention abyssal line**

Discourse as language is the place where structures of domination, symbolic order and legitimacy converge (Jabri, 1996), constituting an important mechanism of controlling, constructing, or transforming societies. Indeed, language does not limit itself to objectively reflecting or describing a given reality; rather, it actively constructs a specific version of it (Ibid.), thereby attempting to exclude other possible interpretations. By means of discourse as language, narratives are created, events or issues are shaped, and labels and roles are assigned in everyday occurrences (e.g. an accident, a fight, a shopping episode), in historic events (e.g. long-term relations between two different peoples/religions/nations or old battles), and in establishing, naturalising and legitimising social hierarchies (e.g. in terms of gender or race). Discourse can, hence, be a form of institutionalisation, legitimation, and mobilisation towards violence or, conversely, towards peace. This happens in all societies, but is particularly manifest in post-conflict contexts, in particular when it comes to issues regarded as vital, such as insecurity and threats to survival (openly or discreetly identified).

Hierarchical co-relationships between discursive domains and actors exist across time and societies, and they influence, through social, political, economic, and cultural authority, the respective beliefs and actions of societies and groups. Among all discursive actors in today's societies, the media are clearly at the forefront. This is mostly because of the use of language, its mediation power, ubiquity nature<sup>14</sup> and pervasiveness. Besides the aforementioned power of the use of language, the media are ubiquitous in people's lives. It is difficult to conceive a day where our routine does not come across at any moment with information or entertainment content of the media, even if one does not look for them deliberately. They become obligatory passing points (Callon & Latour, 1981:287) not because they are imposed as such, but because they themselves and their social representations are endlessly reproduced through the details

14. Santos (2012 & 2015) explores the global hegemonic conception of the media, identifying four elements which justify/support its power: language, technology, mediation and ubiquity.

of social practice itself (Couldry, 2000:5). Due to language, the media are a very rich actor, from a communication and narrative-building perspective. Due to ubiquity and mediation capacity, the media end up modelling what people know, pay attention, dismiss as less important, highlight, or ignore (Shaw, 1979). The media garner, therefore, strong conditions to influence the reality created on the individual and collective imaginaries (Harris & Morrison, 2003), with evident repercussions on social dynamics, whether on the social relational pattern (e.g. attitudes and behaviours) or on the structural level (e.g. social organizational, management of economic resources, political system) (Santos, 2012). It also provides people with tools to interpret and react towards reality.

The importance of the role of the media within post-conflict societies is based upon their power to validate specific narratives while excluding others. Within post-conflict contexts, this is particularly relevant in what concerns three processes/dynamics. First, the violent conflict that was just brought to a halt, was mainly created and fuelled by means of narratives, to a great extent disseminated through the media, which mobilised, legitimised and validated accounts and subsequent (violent) actions. To successfully deconstruct harmful narratives is essential to involve all mediascape, and not just high-technological media. Second, post-conflict societies are highly and densely securitised not only in terms of issues, such as resources or political representation, but also in terms of relationships between groups, or victims and perpetrators. Social and political relations within this context become extremely securitized as there is a generalised insistence on basing the social relational pattern on a dichotomised dynamic that includes the perception of threat, on one side, and security seeking, on the other, often mediated through fear, hatred and violence. The risk of societies which remain securitised and based on dysfunctional relations is the inability to overcome the violence cycle, understood in terms of direct and visible violence, but also in structural and cultural terms (see Galtung, 1969, 1990). The media can perform a key role in breaking this violence cycle by tackling the root causes of conflict, bringing parties closer together, promoting political discussions and deconstructing harmful narratives. It is undeniable the importance of discourse as language in the de-securitization of war-torn societies. Violence penetrates ideational and symbolic structures of individuals, influencing the way they perceive other actors and the way they react towards them. In order to transform demonized social representations of others, discursive messages as well as positive interaction are crucial.

Finally, for a peacebuilding process to be successful it must allow local participation and expression (Large, 1998), as well as local knowledges (Lederach, 1997), to emerge and thrive – a promise, the liberal peacebuilding model has, so far, kept unfulfilled.

The foundation of the ecology of knowledges is the idea that all knowledges are incomplete. Consequently, a combination of knowledges is needed and any proposal should depart from that assumption. All media needs therefore to be recognised and integrated in peacebuilding processes in a horizontal logic where both the positive and the negative elements of each means of communication can be identified and discussed in terms of their emancipatory or violent potential. In each context, it is therefore crucial to offer all mediascape the same possibility of presence, dialogue and integration in peacebuilding activities.

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